

## MONO COUNTY GENERAL PLAN DRAFT EIR



### SECTION 4.10

## AESTHETICS, LIGHT & GLARE, SCENIC RESOURCES

### 4.10.1 INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

This section describes aesthetic and scenic resources in Mono County as well as efforts to maintain the quality of nighttime views by limiting sources of light and glare, as well as the potential impacts on these resources that may occur in association with the proposed comprehensive *RTP/General Plan Update*. This section incorporates and responds to NOP comments received from Caltrans noting that the National Scenic Byway program has been discontinued. Information for this section is based in part on data from the Mono County MEA (Scenic Resources, 2010), as well as other sources as cited in the text. Key findings are summarized in the table below.

#### SUMMARY OF GENERAL PLAN IMPACTS & POLICY MITIGATIONS FOR AESTHETICS, LIGHT & GLARE, SCENIC RESOURCES

<b><u>IMPACT LU 4.10(a):</u></b>	<b><u>SCENIC RESOURCE IMPACTS</u></b>
Pre-Mitigation Significance:	Potentially Significant Impacts
Mitigating Policies:	See Table 4.10-3 in Appendix D
Residual Significance:	Potentially Significant Impacts
<b><u>IMPACT LU 4.10(b):</u></b>	<b><u>IMPACTS TO VISUAL CHARACTER</u></b>
Pre-Mitigation Significance:	Potentially Significant Impacts
Mitigating Policies:	See Table 4.10-3 in Appendix D
Residual Significance:	Potentially Significant Impacts
<b><u>IMPACT LU 4.10(c):</u></b>	<b><u>LIGHT AND GLARE EFFECTS</u></b>
Pre-Mitigation Significance:	Potentially Significant Impacts
Mitigating Policies:	See Table 4.10-3 in Appendix D
Residual Significance:	Potentially Significant Impacts

### 4.10.2 KEY TERMS USED IN THIS SECTION

**Glare.** Glare is a visual sensation caused by excessive and uncontrolled brightness. It can be disabling or simply uncomfortable. The experience of glare is subjective, and sensitivity to glare can vary widely. Older people are usually more sensitive to glare due to the aging characteristics of the eye. Disabling glare is the reduction in visibility caused by intense light sources in the field of view, while discomfort glare is the sensation of annoyance or even pain induced by overly bright sources. Sources of glare include streetlights, parking lot lights, floodlights, signs, sports field lighting, decorative and landscape lights, and reflective surfaces (particularly glass and metal).

**Light Pollution and Light Trespass.** Light pollution is an unwanted consequence of outdoor lighting and includes such effects as sky glow, light trespass and glare. Sky glow is a brightening of the sky caused by both natural and human-made factors. Outdoor lighting is the principal contributor to light pollution. Light trespass is light being cast where it is not wanted or needed.

**Visual Character.** Visual character includes geologic, hydrologic, botanical, wildlife, recreational, and urban features associated with the natural and developed setting. The perception of visual character can vary seasonally and even hourly in response to weather, light, shadow, and other elements that affect the viewshed. Components often used to

describe visual character include elements of form, line, color, and texture of the landscape features, while the appearance of the landscape is influenced by the dominance of each of these components.

**Visual Quality.** Visual quality reflects the relative degree of vividness, intactness, and unity in a viewshed. Vividness refers to the visual power or memorability of landscape components. Intactness refers to the visual integrity of the natural and human-built landscape and its freedom from encroaching elements. Unity refers to the visual coherence and compositional harmony of the landscape considered as a whole. High-quality views are highly vivid, relatively intact, and exhibit a high degree of visual unity. Low-quality views lack vividness, are not visually intact, and possess a low degree of visual unity. Judgments of visual quality also reflect the regional geographic frame of reference: a small hill may be a significant visual element on a flat landscape but have relatively little significance in mountainous terrain.

**Scenic Highway/Scenic Route.** A transportation corridor (highway, road, drive, or street) that provides opportunities for the enjoyment of natural and human-made scenic resources and access or direct views to areas or scenes of exceptional beauty and/or historic or cultural interest. The aesthetic values of scenic routes often are protected by regulations governing the development of property or the placement of outdoor advertising. Until the mid-1980s, general plans in California were required to include a Scenic Highways Element.

**Scenic Corridor.** The scenic corridor includes all areas outside a highway right of way that possess scenic value and are generally visible to persons traveling on the highway.

### 4.10.3 BASELINE OVERVIEW

#### 4.10.3.1 Scenic Resources

MEA Chapter VIII, Scenic Resources, notes that Mono County is a land of spectacular visual resources. Lush meadows, ancient seas, crystal-clear lakes, volcanic cones, soaring peaks and glaciated valleys, river canyons and water cascades form a singular landscape that remains largely free from development. Flanked by vast wilderness areas to the east and west, US 395 passes through historic small towns and main streets that evoke the authentic and eclectic history of the American West.

The relatively low timber resource value has kept county lands free from the effects of timber harvesting, and mineral extraction activities have been relatively isolated. An impressive network of scenic highways (federal, state and locally designated) and informative kiosks and historical monuments provides motorists with grand sights and adventure, while less-traveled trails and backroads provide access to the remote peaks and canyons. As the sun sets on this veritable scenic wonderland, brilliant night skies emerge providing some of the best stargazing in the US. These scenic resources support the tourist-based economy of Mono County and are integral to the continued prosperity of the region as a whole; the County has invested in these resources through a combination of planning initiatives, regulations and strong environmental stewardship.

Over 94% of county lands are federally managed; as a result, the acreage that comes under County regulation is comparatively limited. However, over 90% of all development within Mono County occurs on that remaining 6% of land, exerting a significant influence on the scenic value of this land.

The City of Los Angeles owns about 60,000 acres of land in Mono County (approximately 7.8% of total land area) compared to 250,000 acres in Inyo County. Most of the City of Los Angeles-owned land in Mono County is open to the public for daytime recreational use (fishing, hiking, hunting, nature studies, photography, etc.).<sup>1</sup> LADWP actively limits development on these lands, which were acquired for water rights, and Mono County has further preserved the visual quality of these lands by designating them for open space.

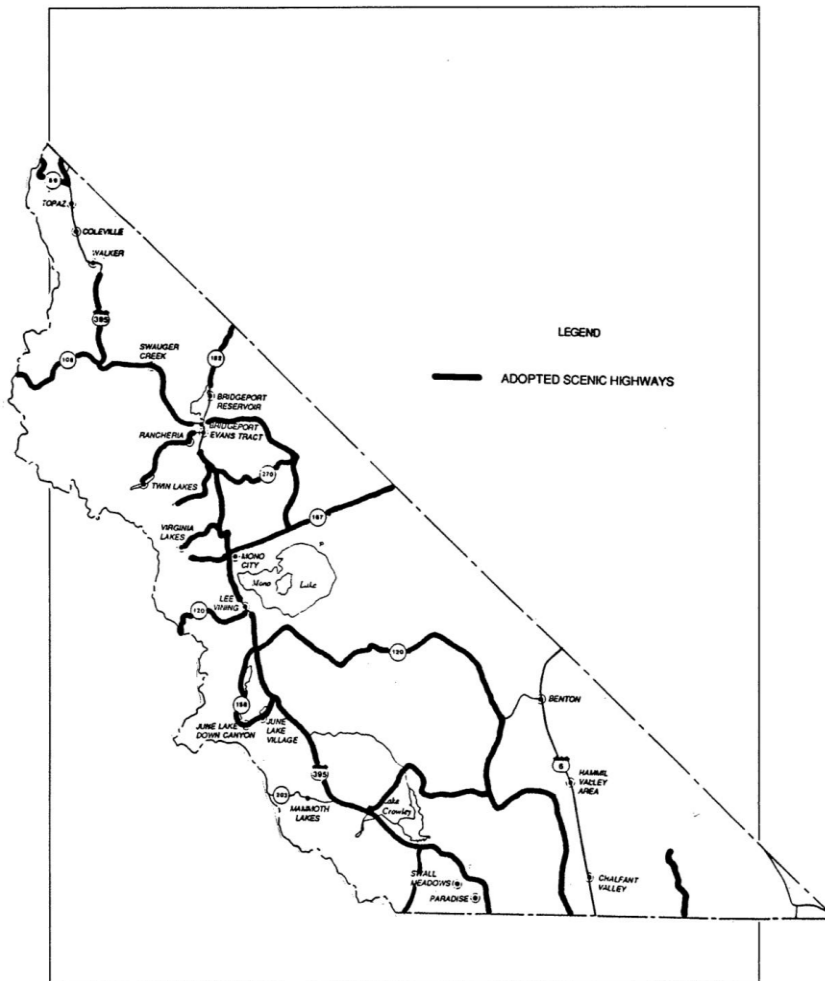
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<sup>1</sup> DWP website: <http://wsoweb.ladwp.com/Aqueduct/recuses/recreationindex.htm>

**Scenic Combining District.** The built environment occasionally contrasts with the natural environment: some structures, roadways, and above-ground power lines are easily discernible even from great distances. Sunlight reflects from metal and glass surfaces during the day, and lighting in communities can impact surrounding natural areas. The existing

General Plan regulates visual resources along scenic highways through policies in the Scenic Combining District Land Development Regulations (part of the Land Use Element). These policies regulate building color and materials, landscaping, grading, vegetation removal, topography, ridgeline construction, lighting, fencing and screening in a manner consistent with the purpose and goals of the scenic highway programs. All development within 1,000' of a scenic highway (not including land inside developed communities) is subject to provisions of the Scenic Combining District.

**Dark Sky Regulations.** The county Dark Sky Regulations (Land Use Element, Ch. 23) protect night sky views and limit glare by restricting unnecessary upward projection of light. These regulations do not apply north of the Mountain Gate community. To end the proliferation of utility poles, the County also requires that power lines be installed underground for all new construction. The County pairs its regulations with information and guidelines, including educational materials distributed to provide applicants with design recommendations and suggestions for minimizing intrusive light sources.



**Figure 4.10-1: Adopted Scenic Highways in Mono County**

**Scenic Highways.** The MEA notes that many of Mono County's scenic resources are visible from the highways, and many visitors to Mono County experience these scenic resources primarily from the highways. Figure 4.10-1 depicts the 389.8 miles of adopted Scenic Highways in Mono County, including Federal Scenic Byways, State Scenic Highways, the El Camino Sierra Scenic Byway,<sup>2</sup> and county Scenic Highways.

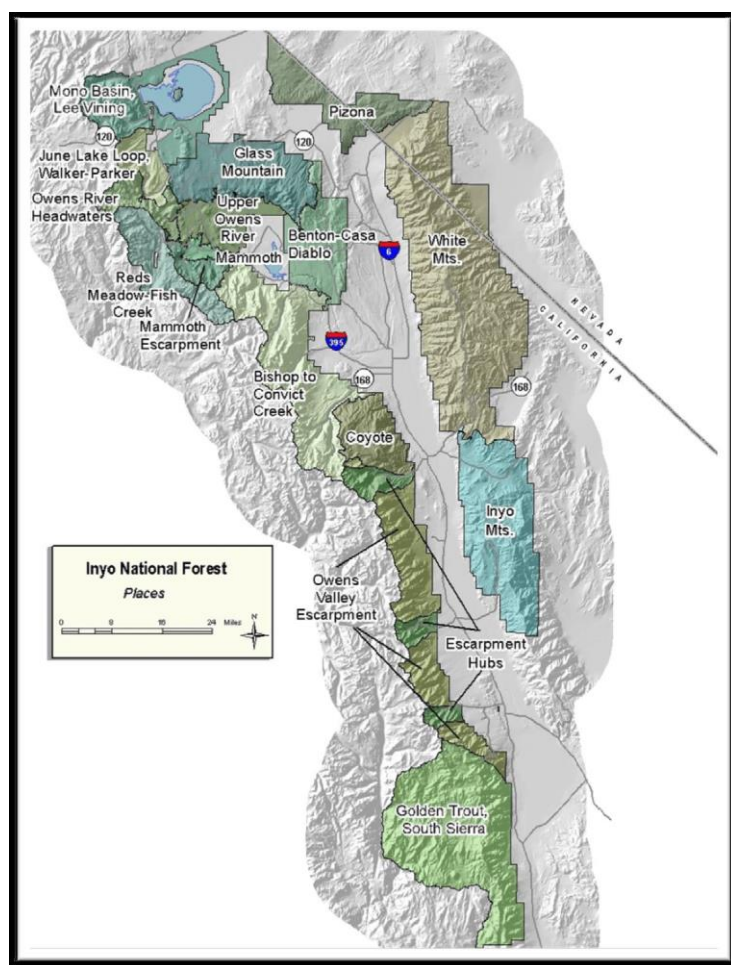
Designation as a *State Scenic Highway* protects and enhances the natural scenic beauty of a highway and adjacent corridor through special conservation treatment. There are two officially designated State Scenic Highways in Mono County: US 395 from the Inyo County line north to Walker (not including highway segments that pass through communities), and SR 89 near Topaz, as it climbs from US 395 into the Sierra to the Alpine County line. Other sections

are eligible for this designation, including SR 120 to Tioga Pass, SR 158 (the June Lake Loop), SR 203 through the town of Mammoth to the Madera County line, and SR 108 over Sonora Pass.

Many of the most-scenic county roads have not been designated as scenic byways. To preserve these resources, the County has designated a network of *County Scenic Highways*. These routes are subject to requirements of the Scenic Combining District and General Plan policies related to visual resources, both of which restrict the type of development that can occur in the scenic highway corridor. Detailed discussion of each of the 25 designated Scenic Highway segments is provided in the MEA Table VIII.1 (Scenic Highway Detail) and each is identified in the Regional Transportation Plan.

*Federal Scenic Byways* apply to highways on public lands. USFS and BLM both participate in this program, which is designed to increase public awareness and enjoyment of scenic and recreational values. In Mono County there are two designated National Scenic Byways: SR 120 in Lee Vining Canyon, and Forest Road 4501 from the Inyo County line to the Patriarch Grove of bristlecone pines in the White Mountain range.

**Figure 4.10-2: Inyo National Forest Places**



**USFS Assessment of Visual Resources.** A majority of Mono County's visual resources are located on lands managed by USFS in the Inyo National Forest (south of Conway Summit), and in the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest (north of Conway Summit). Until 1996, USFS used the Visual Management System to evaluate impacts to visual resources; in 1996, USFS adopted a new assessment method (the Scenery Management System, SMS) that established specific methods for evaluating and mitigating scenic resource impacts. The MEA notes that both the Inyo and the Humboldt-Toiyabe were still operating under existing forest plans that implement the former Visual Management System, with the intent of implementing the new SMS as their new forest plans are created (a process that is well underway as of 2015).

The *Draft USFS Forest Plan* identifies 16 places as having unique scenic resources (as shown in Figure 4.10-2), and notes that nearly 85% of the Inyo NF is either untouched or has only insignificant changes. The *Plan* identifies existing elements that alter scenic integrity (power lines, communication sites, substations, propane tank storage, geothermal development, ski areas, hydropower facilities, human-made lakes, recreation facilities, resorts, and ephemeral conditions like dust and smoke). The *Plan* also

identifies future trends that have the potential to affect long-term scenic integrity including power line development and replacement, geothermal and alternative energy development, and episodic smoke and dust events.

**BLM Assessment of Visual Resources.** BLM uses a different system to inventory, assess and mitigate impacts on visual resources. The system is based on a determination of the level of visual contrast created between a project and the existing landscape. The basic design elements of form, line, color and texture are used to make this comparison and describe the visual contrast created by the project. Four Visual Resource Management (VRM) classes identify different degrees of modification and modifications allowed to the basic design elements of the landscape:

- Class I – Very High: Visual contrast is not permitted. No modifications will be allowed to change the basic elements of line, form, color or texture.
- Class II – High: Visual contrast is permitted; management activity is seen, but must not attract attention. Changes in any of the basic elements (form, line, color, texture) caused by the activity must not be visible in the characteristic landscape.
- Class III – Moderate: Visual contrast caused by a management activity can be evident, but must remain subordinate to the character of the landscape.
- Class IV – Low: Visual contrast caused by a management activity can attract attention and represent a dominant feature in the landscape; however, it must repeat the form, line, color and texture of the characteristic landscape.

These classes direct the type and extent of development activities permitted on BLM lands, and also determine the appropriate range of activities acceptable for each classified land area.

#### 4.10.3.2 Mono County Scenic Byway Project.<sup>3</sup>

In 2012, Mono County received a grant from the National Scenic Byways Program to develop a *Highway 395 Corridor Management Plan* that would identify and develop enhancement opportunities to preserve and promote the scenic and recreational values along a 100-mile stretch of US 395 through the entire length of Mono County. As noted by Caltrans in its NOP comment letter, the National Scenic Byways Program has since that date been discontinued and replaced by the 'Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Act' ('MAP-21'). However, the County had previously set aside funding to support completion of the National Scenic Byway Program designation. While funding for future Scenic Byway projects may not be available at this time in MAP-21, the National Scenic Byways designation itself has significant ongoing value for tourism, and will play a role in influencing travelers' route selection decisions and thereby increase visitation to Mono County. The Mono County Economic Development Element cites results of a survey of US 395 travelers who visited Mono County, wherein 43% indicated they were much more likely to use a route that was a national scenic byway. An additional 52% indicated that they were 'somewhat more likely' to use a national scenic byway route, and only 6% of respondents were less likely. For these reasons, the County is continuing its efforts to complete the designation process.

Development of the 395 Corridor Management Plan began with a detailed GIS-based assessment of the intrinsic recreational, cultural, historic, scenic and archaeological qualities that represent the unique nature of the Eastern Sierra. The County developed a series of 'Feature Classes' to focus the data collection effort and target the types of information that is required to support project planning and analysis. Data collection and analysis will be followed by preparation of reports, and the deployment of other GIS web services to depict and enhance the visitor experience along the US 395 Corridor.

Already completed is a *Character Inventory and Design Guidelines Handbook* ('Design Handbook') that recommends public and private realm improvements in communities along US 395. The recommendations cover signage and wayfinding, highway configuration, pedestrian and bicycle access, and streetscape elements. Private realm recommendations focus on improvements to frontage properties. Table 4.10-1 summarizes the Handbook recommendations for communities along the US 395 corridor:

TABLE 4.10-1: Design Handbook Recommendations for National Scenic Byway Designation	
COMMUNITY	PUBLIC & PRIVATE REALM IMPROVEMENTS
COLEVILLE	<p><b>Colorized Shoulders/Bike Lanes:</b> Along with new gateway signage, colorized bike lanes will alert drivers that they should slow down &amp; can help connect the community to the elementary and high schools.</p> <p><b>High School Parking Lot:</b> Formalize the parking lot for high school students; provide landscaping at the sidewalk to enliven the public realm.</p> <p><b>Wide Sidewalk with Bus Lane:</b> The current bus lane functions well; add a wide sidewalk to provide ample space for bus loading and unloading.</p>

<sup>3</sup> Sources: Mono County, Administrative Draft Character Inventory & Design Guidelines, Highway 395 Scenic Byway Corridor Communities Design Idea Book, September 2014. Prepared by Opticos Design, Inc.; and Mono County website: <https://gis.mono.ca.gov/site/projects/395ScenicByway>.

	<p><b><u>Midblock Crossing with Pedestrian Refuge:</u></b> Repaint the mid-block crosswalk with white, perpendicular lines for high visibility; long-term, add an island to serve as a pedestrian refuge &amp; create a safe crossing to a revitalized Hardy Park.</p> <p><b><u>Hardy Park Revitalization:</u></b> Recreate/beautify Hardy Park by rebuilding the footbridge over the storm water ditch to serve as an amenity for residents and an image of community identity.</p> <p><b><u>Local Path Connections:</u></b> Build a path of varying material to join private properties through Coleville and create a continuous path for pedestrians.</p> <p><b><u>Speed Signage:</u></b> Coleville benefits from US 395 remaining just two lanes wide through town and the school district location at the north edge of town, which triggers a 25-mph speed zone. The 25-mph speed limit should extend 1/4-mile in either direction from the schools, creating a pedestrian-friendly environment through the community core. Gateway signage should be placed about 1/2 -mile farther out, alerting drivers that they are entering town, coordinated with a speed limit of 40 mph.</p>
<b>WALKER</b>	<p><b><u>Speed Signage:</u></b> As drivers approach Walker, speed should reduce gradually from 65 to 55. One-half-mile on either side of Walker, a gateway sign could announce to drivers that they are entering Walker: for westbound drivers, the gateway sign could coincide with a trailhead to Mountain Gate; eastbound, the firefighter memorial could be enhanced to announce the entrance to Walker. The first context zone would have a speed of 40 mph, transitioning to a third zone in the commercially dense area of town. This third zone would be pedestrian-oriented, with a max speed of 25 mph, increasing comfort for pedestrians and bicyclists, and encouraging drivers to access local Walker businesses.</p> <p><b><u>Light Bollards:</u></b> Walker is proud of its identity as a rural, working community. Pedestrian-scaled lighting could be achieved by lining US 395 with 36" tall lit bollards rather than conventional streetlights. This would provide a downcast light illuminating the ground and create an ambiance unique to Walker. Bollards could be spaced every 15-25 feet, balancing the priorities of better lighting for safety and dark sky compliance with the expense of frequently placed bollard fixtures.</p> <p><b><u>Path and Sign Lighting:</u></b> To encourage tourists to stop in Walker, downcast sign lighting would add a lot of visibility to the community's businesses and help for nighttime navigation. These lights could attach to existing walls and monument signs.</p> <p><b><u>West Walker Gateway:</u></b> Walker's landscape and character have been shaped by fire. The existing memorial to the 2002 crash of a C-130 firefighting tanker can serve as the western gateway into town.</p> <p><b><u>ESTA Bus Stop:</u></b> The ESTA bus stop could be formalized with a bus drive-through lane. This improvement would create frontage to plant landscaping and beautify the entry-point of various tourists arriving by bus.</p> <p><b><u>Mill Creek Seating:</u></b> Work with property owner(s) to create a small outdoor gathering space along the river.</p> <p><b><u>Midblock Crossings:</u></b> The Walker right of way is wide with few locations to provide crossings. Midblock crossings with medians for pedestrian refuge would increase safety and encourage pedestrian traffic.</p> <p><b><u>Colorized Bike Lanes:</u></b> Many bicyclists tour US 395 using the shoulder. A bike lane should be formalized. Colorized bike lanes will signal to drivers that they should slow down.</p> <p><b><u>East Walker Trailhead &amp; Gateway Sign:</u></b> Construct a trail connecting Walker to amenities at Mountain Gate. The trailhead could serve as a southern gateway into Walker where roadway context can change.</p> <p><b><u>Mountain Gate Trailhead and Fishing Platform:</u></b> The new fishing platform is a community asset that should be made accessible to pedestrians and bicyclists.</p> <p><b><u>Slip Lane with Parking:</u></b> Slip lanes provide safer access to parking and reduce curb cuts; slip lanes providing access to multiple businesses encourage foot traffic.</p> <p><b><u>Local Connected Paths:</u></b> Adjoining properties should build a path for pedestrians near the building face to increase connectivity without jeopardizing the rural character of Walker.</p> <p><b><u>Landscaping at the Public Right of Way:</u></b> Use street trees and other vegetation to landscape at the street's edge, visually unifying the streetscape, enclosing the highway and encouraging drivers to slow.</p>
<b>BRIDGEPORT</b>	<p><b><u>Speed Signage:</u></b> Recent changes to Bridgeport's Main Street have helped to reduce traffic speeds and provide more space for pedestrians and bicyclists. More can be done to reduce speed and increase multi-modal access. Context zones should be encouraged through physical cues to the driver. Gateway signs would act as the physical reminder to slow to a 40-mph speed limit, while Main Street from Twin Lakes Road to the West Walker River bridge should be a pedestrian zone of 25 mph.</p>
<b>LEE VINING</b>	<p><b><u>Gateway &amp; Speed Signage:</u></b> Similar to Bridgeport, Lee Vining has many pedestrian-friendly amenities: relatively dense buildings near the right of way, ADA-compliant sidewalks, street trees, and a variety of public &amp; semi-public spaces. Context zones would improve safety and encourage tourists to stop and explore Lee Vining. Gateway signage should be added about one mile outside town, before the Mono Lake</p>



	<p>Visitor Center to the north, and at the intersection of US 395 and SR 120 to the south (i.e., the current location). The town center would be the most pedestrian-oriented zone, with a speed limit of 25 mph extending to almost the edge of the half-mile pedestrian shed.</p>
<b>JUNE LAKE</b>	<p><b><u>Monument Signs:</u></b> Monument signs announcing SR 158 and June Lake are two miles from the turnoff -- too far for visitors to remember; the junction seems unannounced. New gateway signs should be moved closer to the intersection of 395 and 158, about one mile from the turn for those heading northwest, and even closer for travelers headed southeast. An additional monument sign should be placed along US 158 to assure visitors of their nearby destination. In June Lake, the boulder is a natural and unique gateway to the village; signage around the boulder should be reduced and/or consolidated to reduce visual clutter. A gateway sign should be added for visitors coming from the Canyon. The gateway signs will alert drivers that they have entered a new context zone and should reduce speeds. A mid-block crossing at either edge of the commercial core would provide another physical cue alerting drivers to the pedestrian-oriented zone.</p> <p><b><u>SR 158 Turnoff:</u></b> Short term: tighten and beautify the entrance to The Junction's parking lot by adding landscaping and a monument sign to attract drivers to June Lake. Long Term: improve the intersection of US 395 and 158 by removing the free right-turn; this will improve safety entering The Junction's parking.</p> <p><b><u>Gateway signage on SR 158:</u></b> Place gateway signage for June Lake shortly after the Highway 158 turnoff to reassure drivers of their desired destination.</p> <p><b><u>Oh! Ridge Improvements:</u></b> Clean up the Oh! Ridge overlook, including trimming treetops that have grown to impede the views of June Lake.</p> <p><b><u>Boulder and Trail Parking:</u></b> Short Term: consolidate Caltrans signage that clutters the Boulder. Long term: consider ways to make the Boulder a safer, more picturesque photo-op, with minor improvements such as pavers, landscaping, or small informational signage about the Boulder's geology. Likewise, formalize the trailhead across the street; a parking lot could provide a place for tourists to stop and explore.</p> <p><b><u>East Gateway into Village:</u></b> Where Lakeview Dr. and SR 158 intersect, create a monument to act as an additional gateway into the Village, signaling to drivers that they are entering a pedestrian zone. The monument could be an additional gateway sign, or a tree to be used for winter festivities.</p> <p><b><u>West Gateway into Village:</u></b> Add a monument sign to signal to drivers that they are entering the Village and should slow down; visitors arriving from the Canyon will have a sense of arrival.</p> <p><b><u>Stripe Lakefront Access Routes:</u></b> Stripe a shared vehicular lane with bike lanes to promote multi-modal access to June and Gull lakes.</p> <p><b><u>Boulder Lodge Improvements &amp; Roadside Café:</u></b> Short term: transform the existing asphalt into a drive with landscaping at the highway. Long term: add a porch to the units along SR 158. Consider converting one unit into a café.</p> <p><b><u>Shared Parking Lot:</u></b> Behind the buildings along SR 158, unused land can become a shared parking lot for the businesses along 158 and Crawford Ave. This will encourage drivers to patronize multiple businesses.</p> <p><b><u>Frontage Improvements:</u></b> Various improvements to frontages along SR 158 would enhance the pedestrian experience in June Lake, including landscaping and terracing.</p>
<b>MAMMOTH VICINITY</b>	<p><b><u>Gateway Signage:</u></b> The community of Mammoth Lakes has developed a robust signage and wayfinding program, including new gateway signage at Sierra Park Road. Along US 395, the signage announcing the turnoff for SR 203 is one mile from the turnoff to the north, and three-quarters mile to the south; the sign to the south should be moved to also announce the turnoff for Mammoth Lakes one mile in advance. The existing signage should be replaced when the County develops the branding for the National Scenic Byway, to unite Mammoth Lakes to the other communities along the corridor.</p> <p><b><u>Airport Signage:</u></b> Surrounding the Mammoth Lakes Airport, the signage is sparse, both to signal to drivers of their exit, and the signage directing newly arrived visitors which direction to drive toward Mammoth and nearby amenities. An effort should be made to design wayfinding signage that will use the same branding efforts as the gateway signage along US 395.</p>
<b>CROWLEY LAKE &amp; LONG VALLEY</b>	<p><b><u>Gateway Signage:</u></b> The communities surrounding Crowley Lake include (west to east): Long Valley, McGee Creek, Crowley Lake community, Aspen Springs, Sunny Slopes north of US 395 and Tom's Place south of US 395. Gateway signage should be designed that ties the string of communities together, while maintaining their distinct identity. Because the communities are organized around the old highway alignment, signs could be placed one-quarter-mile from each subsequent turnoff to attract drivers from US 395.</p>

	<b>Pedestrian Zone:</b> Each community should exist as a pedestrian-oriented context zone, with a 25-mph speed limit; corridor connecting the communities would reach a speed of 40 mph.
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The *Handbook* also recommended that natural ridgelines and mountain views should be preserved to the greatest extent possible, and structures should be located away from skylines, ridgelines and visually prominent areas.

#### 4.10.3.3 Mono County Ridgeline Design Guidelines

The Mono County Design Guidelines provide recommended standards for developments proposed on natural ridgelines. The guidelines call for views to be preserved to the extent possible, location of structures away from visually prominent area, provision for a 50' vertical separation between the top of ridgeline and the top of any structure, terracing of structural forms, design of manufactured slopes to include varied contours, and native vegetation to reduce erosion.<sup>4</sup>

#### 4.10.3.4 Eastern Sierra Corridor Management Plan.

Along with the Kern Council of Governments (COG), Inyo County Local Transportation Commission (LTC) and Caltrans, the Mono County LTC is part of an Eastern California Transportation Planning Partnership (ECTPP)<sup>5</sup> that is collaborating to address regional issues and develop a coordinated approach to transportation planning. Recognizing the importance of aesthetic and scenic values, the collaborating agencies created a 2010 Eastern Sierra Corridor Enhancement Program that creates a vision for aesthetic enhancements along the corridor including major design themes, opportunities for enhanced landscape and aesthetic treatments, corridor connectivity, regional distinctiveness, and aesthetic enhancement of local communities.

The plan notes that the corridor abounds with fascinating and diverse visual resources that are anchored by the consistent and defining elements of the Sierra Range on the west and mountain ranges of the Great Basin on the east. Because vistas are relatively untouched, the man-made intrusions stand out more than would occur in urban areas. The Plan uses distance zones (foreground, middle-ground, and background zones<sup>6</sup>) to assess the visual composition and detail seen by motorists along the corridor.

The Corridor Plan discusses scenic highway and byway designations, noting that there is a range of programs available for California roadways. USFS, BLM and FHWA all run federal programs: BLM's Back Country Byways and USFS's Scenic Byways focus on infrequently traveled roads that access back country or wilderness areas; FHWA programs include National Scenic Byways, which recognize roads and highways that accommodate standard two-wheel drive vehicles, and the All-American Roads programs that focuses on highly scenic roads that can safely accommodate conventional tour buses. As noted above, Mono County is currently preparing a Corridor Management Plan to request designation of the full length of US 395 in Mono County as a National Scenic Byway (the first in the ECTPP planning area). The Corridor plan notes that approval of Native American tribes with reservations along the highway will be required to secure the continuous byway designation, and anticipates that some tribes may have concerns about the prohibition on billboards. To date, the County has not identified tribal concerns regarding the portion of the corridor located within Mono County.

Caltrans manages state designations under the Scenic Highway Program, guided by a statutory list of highways that are eligible for designation (the State will also consider nominated highways via a legislative amendment process). As described in the MEA discussion above, two Mono County roads are currently listed as State Scenic Highways, and three are on the statutory list for designation as a State Highway.

<sup>4</sup> Mono County, *Design Guidelines*, undated.

<sup>5</sup> The ECTPP is sponsored and supported by the Coalition for Unified Recreation in the Eastern Sierra (CURES); additional partnership members include San Bernardino Association of Governments and Southern California Association of Governments.

<sup>6</sup> Zones are described as follows: in foreground zones, viewers can perceive details such as forms, lines, and colors within ¼-mi; changes to the landscape are most significant here, and views can be readily manipulated through screening and aesthetic enhancements. In middle-ground zones, viewers can perceive details such as forms, lines, and colors in masses located from ¼ to 3 miles away. The background zone is the area beyond the middle ground, extending to the visual horizon; viewers can perceive broad forms, lines, wide valleys, distant hills, and mountains.



In comparing the state and federal scenic programs, the *Corridor Plan* notes that both programs emphasize intrinsic qualities such as scenic beauty, and both emphasize road continuity and management. The state program requires adoption by the governing body and places emphasis on land use, grading, and development recommendations along the route, whereas the federal plan requires communities to implement management mechanisms and places emphasis on how the local community will maintain and improve intrinsic qualities; the federal program also provides access to funding sources. Both programs incorporate design standards (including minimal outdoor ads) and both programs support tourism opportunities.

The Eastern Sierra Scenic Byway partnership (which is separate from the state and federal scenic highway programs) focuses on identification of scenic, cultural, historic, and environmental resources and uses a coordinated “Eastern Sierra Scenic Byway” theme and signage to highlight those resources. It includes US 395 from the Nevada State line to southern Inyo County, and SR 120 in Lee Vining Canyon. The byway is marked by entry monument signage and by pole signage directing travelers to interpretive locations. The *Corridor Plan* also emphasizes the important role played by communities along the scenic byway, with an assessment of existing qualities and recommendations for how each community can more fully support byway goals. *Corridor Plan* recommendations for Mono County communities closely parallel recommendations contained in the *Design Handbook*.

#### **4.10.3.4 Inyo National Forest Assessment<sup>7</sup>**

The *Inyo NF Assessment* describes scenic and aesthetic values in terms of the 1995 Scenery Management System (SMS, which replaced the earlier Visual Management System), noting that the SMS has been correlated with the earlier VMS. In terms of scenic integrity (the degree to which a landscape is free from visible disturbances), the *Assessment* indicates that the Inyo NF is currently most affected by power lines, communication sites, substations, propane tank storage, geothermal development, ski areas, hydropower facilities, human-made lakes, recreation facilities, resorts, and ephemeral conditions like dust and smoke. In terms of future trends with potential to affect scenic integrity, the *Assessment* cites power line development and replacement, geothermal and alternative energy development, and episodic smoke and dust events.

In terms of scenic stability (the degree to which the scenic attributes can be sustained over time), the *Assessment* indicates that valued vegetation in the Inyo NF is currently most affected by encroachment, dense vegetation conditions, ecosystem stressors (insects and disease), and risk of severe wildfires. Trends with potential to affect future scenic stability include increasing insect and disease outbreaks, dense vegetative conditions that increase the risk of severe wildfire and diminish scenic beauty, changes in fire frequency or severity, and conifer encroachment on aspen stands.

#### **4.10.3.5 LADWP Land Management Plans<sup>8</sup>**

In 2010, LADWP completed a land management plan that provides management direction for resources on all Los Angeles-owned lands in Inyo County. The plan was an outgrowth of watershed restoration projects undertaken by LADWP in Mono County along the Upper Owens River and its tributaries in Long Valley (Mammoth Creek, Convict Creek, and McGee Creek). Project components in Mono County included installing pasture fencing along stream corridors (to improve streamside habitat by supporting healthy riparian vegetation), and protecting downstream water quality and quantity to the Owens River and Crowley Lake (to reduce grazing and vehicle impacts to stream banks and allow natural ecosystem recovery). The City of Los Angeles owns about 60,000 acres of land in Mono County (approximately 7.8% of total land area), most of which is open to the public for daytime recreational use. As noted in the MEA discussion, LADWP actively limits development on these lands, which were acquired for water rights, and Mono County has further preserved the visual quality of these lands by designating them for open space.

#### **4.10.3.6 BLM Land Management Policies**

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<sup>7</sup> USDA Forest Service, draft *Inyo National Forest Assessment*, November 2013.

<sup>8</sup> LADWP, *Owens Valley Land Management Plan*, April 2010. Prepared by LADWP and Ecosystem Sciences.

BLM land management policies are established through the 1976 Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA), which it administers. The guiding principle of FLPMA is to protect “the quality of scientific, scenic, historical, ecological, environmental, air and atmospheric, water resource and archaeological values.” BLM manages roughly 261 million acres of public lands across the US including 11 million acres in California. BLM’s management goal is to preserve and protect public lands in their natural condition to the extent possible, and to retain federal ownership unless national interests dictate otherwise. Uses of lands managed by BLM include commercial uses (livestock grazing, mineral extraction, and logging), recreational uses (fishing, hunting, birding, boating, hiking, biking, and off-roading), and conservation (of biological, archeological, historical, and cultural resources).

#### 4.10.3.7 El Camino Sierra Scenic Byway

The El Camino Sierra Scenic Byway commemorates a trail that extends from Los Angeles to Lake Tahoe (generally parallel to US 395) that was originally constructed in the 1800s. A recent collaboration between Mono County, Inyo County, Inyo NF and other regional interest groups provided for enhancements such as scenic byway kiosks, vista points, and rest areas along this historic route.

#### 4.10.4 REGULATORY SETTING

##### 4.10.4.1 Federal Regulations

**Bureau of Land Management.**<sup>9</sup> BLM administers the National Back Country Byways program, established in 1989 as a component of the National Scenic Byways Program. Since many BLM-designated byways cross other federal, state, county and private lands, their designation and management can vary based on the agency responsible for byway management. BLM currently manages 54 BLM-designated National Back Country Byways totaling roughly 2,952 miles in 11 western states. In addition to the BLM National Back Country Byways, approximately 60 National Scenic Byways or State-designated scenic byways (nearly 2,500 miles) traverse BLM lands in seven states. BLM byway classifications include: • Type I: Roads that are paved or have an all-weather surface, with grades that are negotiable by a normal touring car. These roads are usually narrow, slow-speed, secondary roads. • Type II: Roads that require vehicles with a high-clearance (trucks or four-wheel drive). These roads are usually not paved but may have some type of surfacing. • Type III: Roads that require four-wheel-drive vehicles or other specialized vehicles such as dirt bikes, all-terrain vehicles (ATVs), etc. • Type IV: Trails that are managed specifically to accommodate dirt bikes, mountain bikes, snowmobile, or ATV use.

**United States Forest Service (USFS).**<sup>10</sup> The National Forest Scenic Byway system was created in 1987 and is administered by the United States Forest Service (USFS). The system consists of 138 National Forest Byways, each administrated by the designated USDA Forest Service Chief. The goal of the National Forest Scenic Byway system is to enhance rural community tourism by providing access to scenic and historic viewpoints. Although the byway system is a federal program, many of the byways are administered and maintained under state, county or local jurisdiction. These byways are designated jointly with FHWA, USFS and State Departments of Transportation. They are also eligible for special project assistance and funding through both DOT Federal Lands and other Scenic Byways programs. Five Mono County routes are designated as scenic byways; SR 120 West into Yosemite Valley; SR 120 East to Benton; SR 158 June Lake Loop; SR 203 to Minaret Vista, and ; Rock Creek Road. USFS and BLM own or lease land for a number of cell towers (including new and historical features).

**National Scenic Byways Program.**<sup>11</sup> The National Scenic Byways Program is part of the Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). Under the program, certain roads are recognized as National Scenic Byways based on their archaeological, cultural, historic, natural, recreational, and scenic qualities. To be considered for National Scenic Byways, a road must have at least one intrinsic quality of regional significance; currently there are 150 such designated byways in 46 states that are collectively promoted by FHWA as “America’s Byways.” The policy also

<sup>9</sup> BLM Website: [http://www.blm.gov/wo/st/en/prog/Recreation/recreation\\_national/byways.html](http://www.blm.gov/wo/st/en/prog/Recreation/recreation_national/byways.html), accessed 3-24-15.

<sup>10</sup> USFS Website: <http://www.fs.fed.us/recreation/programs/tourism/TourUS.pdf>, accessed 3-24-15.

<sup>11</sup> FHWA Website: [http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/hep/scenic\\_byways/](http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/hep/scenic_byways/), accessed 3-24-15.

specifies the type of projects eligible for funding as well as funding priorities. Program goals include: support/enhance rural community economic development; showcase outstanding national forest/grassland scenery; increase public understanding of national forests and the importance of sustaining healthy ecosystems; ensure that people remain socially connected to public lands; and contribute to the nation's overall scenic byways effort. Because nearly half of all National Scenic Byways are located (in part of whole) on Forest System or other public lands, USFS is a major partner in developing and promoting the National Scenic Byways Program. FHWA requires submittal of a corridor management plan as part of the application process and, as noted, Mono County is currently preparing a plan to support designation of US 395 as a National Scenic Byway. The plan will outline the County's strategy for identifying and ensuring that the intrinsic qualities are protected. As noted in the Introduction to this EIR §4.10, NOP comments were received from Caltrans noting that the National Scenic Byway program has been discontinued.

#### **4.10.4.2 State Regulations.**

**California Department of Transportation (Caltrans).** California's Scenic Highway Program is administered by Caltrans to preserve and protect scenic highway corridors from changes that would diminish views of the natural landscape. A scenic corridor is typically identified using a motorist's line of vision within a reasonable boundary. The State Scenic Highway program was developed in 1963 to "protect and enhance the natural scenic beauty of California highways and adjacent corridors through special conservation treatment." Caltrans designates State Scenic Highways throughout California. The designation of a scenic highway depends on a variety of factors, including "how much of the landscape can be seen by travelers, the scenic quality of the landscape, and the extent to which development intrudes upon the traveler's enjoyment of the view." The scenic highway designation applies to a specific scenic corridor of the highway. The designation provides benefits to scenic resources along the highway, some of which include protection from incompatible uses, mitigation of activities within the corridor that detract from the highway's scenic quality, and preservation of hillsides. As previously mentioned, there are two officially designated State Scenic Highways in Mono County: U.S. 395, from the Inyo County line north to Walker (not including highway segments that pass through communities), and SR 89 near Topaz, as it climbs from U.S. 395 into the Sierra to the Alpine County line. Sections are statutorily eligible for this designation include SR 120 to Tioga Pass, SR 158 (the June Lake Loop), SR 203 through the town of Mammoth Lakes to the Madera County line, and SR 108 over Sonora Pass.

#### **4.10.4.3 Regional and Local Regulations**

**Mono County General Plan.** Chapter 8 of the Mono County General Plan Land Use Element sets forth regulations for the Scenic Combining District & State Scenic Highways. As discussed more fully under Impact 4.10(a) below, this district regulates development in scenic areas outside communities with the goal of minimizing visual impacts; use of the S-C district is also encouraged in other scenic areas, and all development within 1,000' of a scenic highway (not including land inside communities) is subject to provisions of the Scenic Combining District. Note that the term 'Scenic Highway' is a state designation, whereas the S-C District is a County regulation. The Mono County Conservation/Open Space Element contains provisions requiring that visual impacts be mitigated to less than significant levels unless a Statement of Overriding Considerations is adopted by the Mono County Board of Supervisors, and most of the Mono County Area Plans include regulations to protect and enhance visual and aesthetic resources. The General Plan includes a section that sets forth height restrictions and reclamation requirements for cell towers, including impact mitigation strategies and identification of preferred treatments (including mono-pines, rocks, water tanks, windmills, barns and clock towers). The County has also adopted signage regulations specifically intended to minimize impacts to the visual and aesthetic resources of Mono County.

#### **4.10.5 SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA**

Consistent with Appendix G of the CEQA Guidelines, the proposed RTP/General Plan update project will be considered to have a significant impact on scenic and aesthetic resources if it will:

- a) Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista or scenic resources including trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway?
- b) Substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings?
- c) Create a new source of substantial light or glare that would adversely affect day or nighttime views?

#### 4.10.6 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATING POLICIES AND ACTIONS

**IMPACT 4.10(a):** Would implementation of the proposed RTP/General Plan Update have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista or scenic resources including trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway?

**SIGNIFICANT ADVERSE IMPACT.** The *Draft General Plan Update* does not increase development potential over what would be allowed under the current 2001 Land Use Element. However, both the 2001 and the proposed 2015 General Plan Land Use Element would allow development levels much higher than the levels that exist today. EIR §4.12 (Population and Housing) presents information about current and projected population levels in Mono County. As noted therein, the county's 2010 population (not including the town of Mammoth Lakes) was 5,968. In contrast, the 2015 General Plan "maximum" build-out population in the unincorporated areas is estimated to be 48,702; even the "practical" build-out population (37,657) exceeds current population levels by 630%.

In relative terms, the proposed Land Use Element update will have fewer impacts on scenic resources than the 2001 Land Use Element, due to the many mitigating plans and policies developed as part of the current *Update*, as well as the Conway Ranch proposal to re-designate approximately 855 acres of land currently designated as Specific Plan to Open Space. However, future development clearly has the potential to adversely impact scenic vistas and the overall value of scenic resources as they exist in the current baseline setting. Impacts on scenic resources will be most strongly felt in the communities, where a majority of development would occur. As part of the County's data gathering for the National Scenic Byways application, the Design Handbook provides an overview of the iconic and intrinsic qualities that best define Mono County communities along US 395. Table 4.10-2 lists these intrinsic qualities:

TABLE 4.10-2: Intrinsic Qualities of Mono County Communities along US 395					
Walker & Coleville	Bridgeport	Lee Vining	June Lake	Mammoth Vicinity	Crowley Lake & Long Valley
Iconic or Physical Characteristics					
White Wood Bridge	Historic Courthouse	Mono Lake	Alpine Lakes	Mountain Range; lava domes	Long Valley Caldera
Canyon/Cliff walls	Contiguous Main Street	Tufa	Boulder	Skiing, Culture	Crowley Lake and fishing
West Walker River - Antelope Valley	Grazing land in Bridgeport Valley	Connection to Yosemite NP	Oh! Ridge	Ski resort/The Village	
Effect of fire on landscape	Fishing, Hot Springs	Long Vistas	Mountain and skiing, fishing	Twin Lakes	
Sagebrush, cottonwood	Twin Lakes Recreation		Old resort town/ European mountain village	Coniferous, bristlecone	
Working landscapes, ranching	Bodie Ghost Town		Pedestrian scale	Granite	
River rock	Sandstone		Granite		
Descriptive Adjectives					
Self-sufficient/ "Western"	Historic	Cosmopolitan, International	Quaint/Charming, Nordic	Destination	Rural villages
Authentic, Roadside	Roadside		Hidden Gem	Modern	Rustic
Wood, Neon	Painted wood, Neon				
Primary Intrinsic Quality					
Scenic	Historic	Scenic	Recreational/ Scenic	Recreational/ Scenic	Scenic/ Natural

Resources located inside community areas are not protected under provisions of Chapter 8 (the Scenic Combining District and Scenic Highway Corridor), which regulates development activity in scenic areas outside communities. These resources would be *better* enhanced if the National Scenic Byway Corridor Plan is approved, since provisions in the Corridor Plan are especially focused on protecting intrinsic qualities of communities along US 395 through design improvements. Recommendations include improved signage and wayfinding, highway configuration, pedestrian and bicycle access, community streetscapes and improvements to privately owned frontage properties.

Areas outside existing communities would be less directly affected by development allowed under the *draft General Plan*, since the large majority of development allowed in the Land Use Element is confined to community areas. However, some land uses do characteristically occur outside communities; these uses include AG-agriculture, NHP-natural habitat protection, RE-resource extraction, RM-resource management, SAA-scenic area agriculture, and OS-open space. The rural designations (RMH-rural mobile home, RR-rural residential, and RU-rural resort) and the SP-specific plan designation can also occur in areas well removed from community centers. As discussed in EIR §4.1 (Land Use) Table 4.1-6 (Land Use Designations Countywide, 2001 and proposed Land Use Element), the County estimates that some level of future residential development is possible on lands with all of these use designations. However, although Table 4.1-7 in EIR §4.1 (Land Use) points to substantial changes in acreage for a number of use designations, these changes are largely the result of improved polygon analysis and GIS mapping tools used in the current update.

Compared with the 2001 General Plan, the 2015 *General Plan Update* incorporates only minor revisions to most land uses and in most communities, and all proposed changes are consistent with community preferences as developed through extensive RPAC workshops and expressed in local area plans (most of which include provisions for protections of scenic resources). Most of the changes are a direct result of fine-tuning made possible with use of GIS and polygon analysis, as well as repeal of the Conway Ranch Specific Plan, General Plan Amendments approved since 2001, and refinements to planning area designations and boundaries. The most significant change, in terms of acreage, is associated with repeal of the Conway Ranch Specific Plan, where 855 acres of land that was previously designated for development will now be preserved through a Management Plan that addresses a wide range of ecological and public uses that will allow for protection of scenic resources to a much greater extent that would have been possible under the prior Specific Plan.

The Integrated Waste Management Program is another of the planning initiatives with potential to impact scenic views and resources. The draft *Countywide Siting Element* includes methods to monitor landfill capacity, tools to ensure that capacity doesn't fall below 15 years, and guidelines for the siting of new facilities when the Benton Crossing Regional Landfill closes in 2023.<sup>12</sup> The *Countywide Siting Element* notes that solid waste disposal in the County is currently conducted at three active landfill sites, two of which (Pumice Valley and Walker) accept only inert construction and demolition (C&D) waste for burial and transfer all municipal solid waste off site for disposal. The Benton Crossing Landfill is the regional landfill, and the only site accepting municipal solid wastes. The Siting Element identifies two actions to ensure adequate long-term disposal capacity, including development of engineered design plans for Pumice Valley and Walker landfills using capacity within the existing waste footprint at each facility, and providing for Long-Haul Transfer Infrastructure to transport wastes out of Mono County. If the County eventually elects to develop engineered design plans for Pumice Valley and Walker landfills, the scenic impacts of the expanded facilities would be *largely unchanged* from the existing condition due to use of the existing footprint. Use of Long-Haul Transfer would create potential for scenic impacts at the receiving site(s) outside Mono County. In either case, supplemental CEQA analyses will be required to analyze the full range of potential environmental effects, including impacts to scenic resources.

Chapter 7 of the *Draft Land Use Element* regulates signage, with a focus on enhancing the unique scenic beauty of Mono County, and promoting the safety of pedestrians; cyclists and motorists. The regulations stipulate that area plan provisions will apply if more restrictive than the countywide standards of Chapter 7. Prohibitions include offsite

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<sup>12</sup> <sup>12</sup> Supplement to the Mono County General Plan Land Use Amendments Final EIR, SCH #98122016 & #2004082091 Prepared for Benton Crossing Landfill General Plan Amendment #04-02 Use Permit Application #37-04-08 DRAFT December, 2004 Mono County Planning Department.

advertising and billboards, as well as signs exceeding 20' in height, animated and portable signs, and use of neon or internal lighting (except with Director approval).

Future development clearly has the potential, in absolute terms, to adversely impact scenic vistas and scenic resources. However, because overall land use intensity is similar to the 2001 *General Plan*, and slightly lower in some areas (particularly in the Mono Basin due to repeal of the Conway Ranch Specific Plan), the current project will have fewer long-term development impacts than the 2001 Land Use Element. Furthermore, the programs and policies contained in the proposed *RTP/General Plan Update* would serve to *avoid or reduce* some of the impacts on scenic vistas and resources that would result under the 2001 Land Use Element. Most notably, implementation of the proposed policies and actions contained in the *RTP/General Plan Update* would ensure that new development is located in and around existing community areas and developed in a manner that reflects the design and planning standards and guidelines of the National Scenic Byway Plan. These standards and guidelines focus on recognizing, preserving and enhancing the scenic, historical, recreational, cultural, archaeological and natural intrinsic qualities of the US 395 corridor, along which most Mono County communities are located.

Scenic resources outside community areas will continue to benefit from standards and guidelines of the Scenic Combining District, requirements associated with the State Scenic Highway designation, and the Land Use Element. No new impacts to scenic resources have been identified, and no impacts would be made more severe. The focus on enhancement of scenic resources and preservation of open space and agricultural lands would, in combination with the mitigating policies outlined below, substantially reduce impacts to visual resources. However, given the overall high value of scenic and aesthetic resources in Mono County, the scale of development associated with long-term buildout will result in unavoidable changes to scenic vistas and scenic resources within view of state scenic highways (many of which pass through Mono County communities). Potential impacts are thus considered to be ***significant and adverse***.

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**RTP/GENERAL PLAN POLICIES AND ACTIONS THAT  
MITIGATE IMPACTS TO SCENIC RESOURCES**

Please refer to Table 4.10-3 in Appendix D

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<b>IMPACT 4.10(b):      Would implementation of the proposed RTP/General Plan Update substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings?</b>
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**SIGNIFICANT ADVERSE IMPACT.** Both the existing and the proposed *General Plan Land Use Element* identify protection of scenic resources as shared countywide priority, as reflected in the discussion of countywide issues, opportunities and constraints: “*The County’s RPACs and community planning groups have generally expressed a desire to maintain the rural recreational attributes of the county, to preserve the small-town character of existing communities, and to protect the county’s natural resources. The overall attitude is that growth should be contained in and adjacent to existing communities, that agricultural lands should be protected for their open space and economic value, that the protection of scenic resources is a critical concern, and that the use and development of resources should be regulated in a manner that allows for development but that protects the resource.*”

As described in discussion under Impact 4.10(a) above, 2015 *General Plan Update* incorporates only minor revisions to most land uses throughout the county. However, numerous components of the proposed *Draft RTP/General Plan Update* will serve to protect scenic resources and minimize degradation of the visual character of Mono County lands. Most significantly, proposed repeal of the Conway Ranch Specific Plan will result in an Open Space designation for 855 acres of land that would previously have been developed with uses including a resort lodge and cabins, residential uses (single-family, townhouse and mini-lodges), recreation, open space, and infrastructure. The Conway Ranch Conservation Easement ensures the long-term conservation of this property, with identified prohibitions that include (among others) billboards and advertising except as expressly allowed.



Visual character and quality along the scenic highways will be protected through the special conservation treatments required for adopted Scenic Highways. In Mono County, these include Federal Scenic Byways, State Scenic Highways, the El Camino Sierra Scenic Byway,<sup>33</sup> and County Scenic Highways. Visual resources in areas adjoining the designated scenic highways will be protected by requirements of the Scenic Combining District Land Development Regulations. These policies regulate building color and materials, landscaping, grading, vegetation removal, topography, ridgeline construction, lighting, fencing and screening in a manner consistent with the purpose and goals of the scenic highway programs. All development within 1,000' of a scenic highway (not including land inside developed communities) is subject to provisions of the Scenic Combining District.

As part of its effort to obtain the National Scenic Byways designation, the County has prepared a *Highway 395 Corridor Management Plan* that would facilitate visual enhancements in communities along US 395. Enhancements to the public realm include visually attractive signage and wayfinding, highway configuration, pedestrian and bicycle access, and streetscape elements. Private realm recommendations focus on improvements to frontage properties. In whole, the improvements would strengthen the scenic and recreational values of lands adjoining US 395 through the entire length of Mono County. These efforts have already been initiated in several Mono County communities, and are planned for other communities, through the Main Street Design Handbooks and associated revitalization plans and alternative parking standards studies.

Close collaboration with USFS and other public land managers will contribute to the protection of visual resources. In its comments on Chapter 9 of the USFS *Draft Forest Plan* (Recreation Settings, Opportunities and Access, and Scenic Character (Chapter 9), the Community Development Department noted that Mono County planning is and will remain heavily influenced by demands for Inyo NF recreation opportunities, access and facilities. The County recognized that partnering has played an increasingly vital role in maintaining recreation services, activities and facilities. In affirmation of its commitment to strengthen the partnership, Mono County has in recent years contributed a portion of its funds to Friends of the Inyo, which in turn uses these funds for trail maintenance and related activities on public lands.

As identified in the *Draft USFS Forest Plan* and elsewhere, there are several primary systemic threats to scenic values in the region. The threats include long-term and wide-ranging ecological damage from high-severity fires, impaired visibility due to fire smoke and impaired air quality generally, habitat changes resulting from invasive species and, most recently, the impacts of sustained drought. The *Draft RTP/General Plan Update* incorporates plans and policies to address all of these threats. As discussed in EIR §4.3 (Air Quality), §4.4 (Biology), §4.6 (Hazards), and §4.8 (Hydrology), not all of these threats can be reduced to less than significant levels. However, none of the proposed *RTP/General Plan* elements or related planning initiatives would cause or contribute to a substantial degradation of the existing visual character of county lands; in fact, elements of the proposed *RTP/General Plan Update* will strongly support the overall goal of protecting scenic and visual resources. However, in consideration of the overall high value of scenic and aesthetic resources in Mono County, long-term buildout development will necessarily result in unavoidable adverse changes to the existing visual character and quality of Mono County communities and environs. Potential impacts are thus considered to be ***significant and adverse***.

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#### **RTP/GENERAL PLAN POLICIES AND ACTIONS THAT MITIGATE IMPACTS TO SCENIC RESOURCES**

Please refer to Table 4.10-3 in Appendix D

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<sup>33</sup> The El Camino Sierra Scenic Byway commemorates a trail that extends from Los Angeles to Lake Tahoe (generally parallel to US 395) that was originally built in the early 1800s. A recent collaboration between Mono County, Inyo County, Inyo National Forest and other regional interest groups provided for enhancements such as scenic byway kiosks, vista points, and rest areas along the historic El Camino Sierra route.

**IMPACT 4.10(c): Would implementation of the proposed RTP/General Plan Update create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area?**

**SIGNIFICANT ADVERSE IMPACT.** The baseline overview of this EIR section outlines key elements of the county Outdoor Lighting Ordinance (Land Use Element, Ch. 23, best known as the 'Dark Sky Regulations'). Broadly, the regulations protect night sky views and limit glare by restricting unnecessary upward projection of light. Other purposes include energy conservation, safe travel, avoidance of nuisance lighting, and protection of the nighttime environment. The regulations apply to all communities in the county except in the Antelope Valley planning area north of Mountain Gate. The regulations are mandatory for new outdoor lighting, and are also applied to existing outdoor lighting whenever part of a new application (for design review, CUP, subdivision approval or building permit). Exemptions are limited to seasonal displays, vehicle lights, temporary lights, lighting mandated by state or federal agencies, and low-wattage address lights. For all other lighting the regulations specifically prohibit glare, light trespass and light pollution, require proper maintenance, minimize allowed contrast in lighting levels, prohibit low-pressure sodium and mercury vapor lamps, limit accent lighting, and require full cut-off luminaires with the light source downcast and fully shielded. Outdoor lighting plans are required for new applications as noted above and also required for all new outdoor lighting installations on commercial, industrial, public and institutional properties (and any other application as deemed necessary by the Community Development Director. In support of energy conservation, the ordinance requires that lighting be turned off for all non-essential outdoor commercial and residential uses, and encourages use of timers, dimmers and photocell controllers.

The County regulates light and glare in airport environments through adopted Airport Land Use Plans for Bryant Field and Lee Vining Airports. As noted in the 2004 Environmental Analysis for the Lee Vining and Bryant Field airport master plans and airport ALUCPs,<sup>14</sup> lighting improvements at both airports include runway edge lighting systems, runway end identifier lights, a precision approach path indicator system, security lighting and terminal lighting, and lighting for airport signs and accessory uses. Runway lighting is radio-controlled by pilots, and lasts for an approximately 15-minute window during each operation. All exterior airport lighting is required to comply with the dark sky requirements of Chapter 23 (described above).

The policies and actions proposed in the Draft *RTP/General Plan Update*, as well as compliance with the existing Dark Sky Regulations and airport Land Use Compatibility Plans, will substantially lessen future impacts on light and glare but not to a level that is less than significant; it is anticipated that **significant adverse impacts** may occur in terms of light and glare with potential to adversely affect views, (particularly nighttime views) in the planning area.

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**RTP/GENERAL PLAN POLICIES AND ACTIONS THAT MITIGATE  
LIGHT AND GLARE IMPACTS**

Please refer to Table 4.10-3 in Appendix D.

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<sup>14</sup> Mono Co. Community Development Department., *Environmental Analysis for the Lee Vining & Bryant Field Airport Master Plans and Airport ALUCP*, March 2006.